



CHEECH MARIN

GETS HIGH ON ART

BY ROSEMARY CARSTENS

**NEOCLASSICAL
CHARM WITH A
DECIDEDLY
LATIN FLAVOR.**

What pops into your mind when you hear the name Cheech Marin? The sidesplitting humor of a stoner smoking the biggest doobie you ever saw? Inspector Joe Domínguez cruising San Francisco in Nash Bridges' über-cool, lemon-yellow Hemi Barracuda? Or do you chuckle at memories of Cheech as the debonair Ignacio Messina chasing Tyne Daly around the *Judging Amy* set?

Well, put all that on ice. Today, Cheech Marin is a man high on art. Throughout his years as an actor, comedian, musician, director, writer,

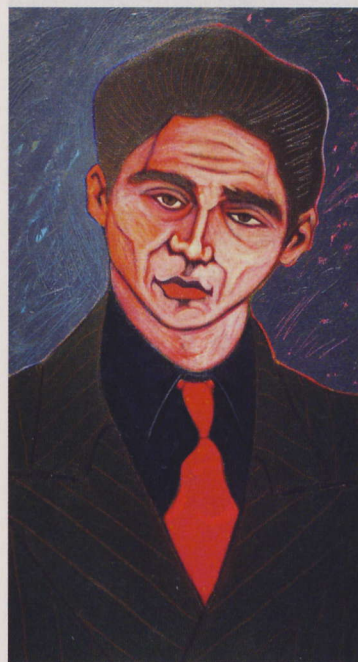
and producer of *salsas habañeras*, he has been a serious connoisseur of Chicano art, with more than 300 pieces in his private collection. Now, Marin has inspired and created "Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge," a highly acclaimed art exhibition that began its run in Houston in October and will remain there through December 23.

Chicano Visions is a celebration of Chicano heritage—it is radiant, filled with life, and emblematic of a culture rich in history and heart. It is a Mexican American phenomenon that blends what is quintessentially Mexican with a dash of American seasoning and a splash of Latin attitude. The art that arises out of this heritage is as vibrant, as biting, as fresh *pico de gallo* with extra *jalapeño*. As Cheech Marin puts it, "Chicano art is an experience, not a style."

Viewed by an estimated 1.2 million people so far, the exhibit features the work of many native Texans, such as César Martínez, whose artistic collaboration is renown far beyond the Southwest. Chicano Visions seeks to introduce a broader cross section of the American public to this unique school of American art, to demonstrate its dazzling interpretations of classic techniques and its more inclusive aesthetic of the human condition.

From its birth in the hot, sweaty grape fields of central California, where Carlos Almaraz painted signs for the United Farm Workers, to the Gronk retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Marin says, "The Chicano school of painting has always

been about reinterpreting a culture. It is at once diverse yet unified, profane and spiritual, traditional and avant-garde." Many of the early artists have evolved from a strictly political agenda to work reflecting more personal concerns. Chicano art speaks volumes about what it is to be Latino in the United States. It is laughter, mariachi, opera, drama, food, love and sorrow. Like Cupid, it skids past rhetoric to penetrate the heart. **H**



CHICANO VISIONS:

From left: Gronk, *La Tormenta Returns*; Patssi Valdez, *Room on the Verge*; George Yepes, *La Pistola y el Corazón*; and César Martínez, *El Güero*.

